

The O.S. Stamps of New South Wales.

BY N.S.W. AND CROWN.



It is possible that Philatelists will read the title of this article, and turn away with indifference, or even a stronger feeling, leaving its perusal for some future day when the atmosphere is less clouded with sulphurous remarks about the series.

But, really, there is no time like the present to publish a "full, true, and particular account" of these really interesting stamps. Their existence as prepayment labels was brought to a close on the 31st of December, 1894, and the reprints which threatened to do, and did, so much harm to their reputation and market value, have been withdrawn from sale and destroyed. Consequently now is the time to gather all the available information in one connected article, so that the student may have sure and certain ground to go upon, the fullest and most reliable data as to varieties officially issued, and such guiding lines with regard to the reprints as will enable him to pursue his collecting tactics well informed as to all mines and pitfalls.

From the date when adhesive stamps were first issued in New South Wales, official correspondence was required to be prepaid by means of such stamps—there being no mark placed upon them to distinguish them from those used for ordinary correspondence. There were a few exemptions from postage, such as communications between the head office and branch or country Post Offices, petitions to the Governor and Legislature, and returns of births, marriages, and deaths; but the bulk of departmental mail matter was franked by stamps representing the ordinary rates of postage.

These stamps were supplied to the various departments on requisition, and the face value debited against their votes for expenditure, thus forming part of the revenue credited to the Post Office.

The Secretary of the Post Office, in June, 1879, suggested that a die for a 2d. stamp of special design should be prepared, and impressions struck on envelopes for official use. The major portion of the official correspondence coming under the 2d. rate, it was submitted that an impressed stamp of that value would be sufficient to serve the purpose, *i.e.*, to save the time expended in affixing adhesive stamps; and that adhesive stamps of the other values in use might be *perforated* with the initials of the respective departments by which they were used, such as P.O. for Post Office, Tr. for Treasury, L.D. for Lands Department, &c. The principles of rendering these stamps available for official correspondence only, requiring them to be affixed to envelopes endorsed "O.H.M.S." and the name of the department, and forbidding their repurchase by the Post Office Department, were concisely laid down.

The general principle of a distinctive stamp for official purposes was approved, and on the suggestion of the Government printer, it was decided to surcharge each denomination of the ordinary postage stamps with the initials "O.S." (on service) in *black*, and to issue them to all Government Departments for official use.

I have seen an essay for an impressed stamp, apparently prepared partly in accordance with the suggestion above referred to.

A circle, with thick outer and thin inner line, contains an inscription in block capitals, "Official Postage New South Wales. One shilling." The centre of the circle is left plain, but beneath this impression there is a diademed profile of Queen to left, on ground of coarse horizontal lines, enclosed in a fine circular line. This was evidently intended to occupy the inscribed circle. The words, "One penny," "Twopence," and "Sixpence," are also printed on the same paper as the above-described two portions of a design. The impressions are in orange-brown, and plate printed. The principle of this essay was never carried out.

The first *Gazette* notice relating to the new system was as follows:—

"GENERAL POST OFFICE,

"SYDNEY, 15th Dec., 1879.

"His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to approve of the introduction of a special description of Postage Stamps for use by the various Government Departments. These stamps—which are distinguishable by the letters 'O.S.' printed thereon in black—are only available for official correspondence, and letters having Postage Stamps of this character affixed thereto are liable to be intercepted by the Post Office, unless the envelopes bear the endorsement 'O.H.M.S.,' with the name of the Department from which they are sent in the corner; or, in the case of letters addressed to a Department, the name of the sender written in the corner.

"Under no pretext whatever will these stamps be purchased by, or exchanged for other Postage Stamps at the Post Office.

"SAUL SAMUEL."

It will be seen that no date was fixed by the notice for the system to come into operation, and it appears somewhat doubtful whether the 1st January, 1880, generally accepted hitherto as the date of issue, was the exact date of the earliest use of O.S. Stamps.

The first requisition sent to the Government printer by the cashier of the General Post Office, for a supply of official stamps, was entered under date "for the week ending 22nd October, 1879," and the order was for 120,000 1d., 240,000 2d., 3000 3d., 30,000 4d., 24,000 6d., and 6000 1s. The first supply of these stamps was issued by the cashier to "Public Offices" during the same week, and consisted of 11,760 1d., 21,720 2d., 1440 4d., 160 6d., and 320 1s.

A brief account of the method followed in the procuring and issuing of these stamps will be useful to the reader.

All stamps were (and are) printed at the Government printing office, the Government printer being also Inspector of Stamps, and supplies were furnished to the cashier of the General Post Office upon requisition, the

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totals of these requisitions being entered in the Cashier's Stamp Receipt and Issue Book. Supplies were obtained by the various public offices from the cashier, also upon requisition, and the quantities were entered as issued, a page of the book being devoted to each week. The page thus showed the total receipts and issues for the week, together with the balance remaining on hand.

At the time of issue of the O.S. stamps, the ordinary adhesive stamps in use were 1d., 2d., 4d., 6d., 9d., 10d., and 1s., from De La Rue's electro-types; and 3d., 5d., 8d., and 5s., from Perkins and Bacon's steel plates. There were also envelopes stamped with the 1d. type, and the small-sized post card of 1876. From these were selected the types which were overprinted with the letters "O.S." on 22nd October, 1879, and subsequent dates, until superseded by types of later-issued stamps.

It will be noticed that the Executive approval and *Gazette* notice both speak of the overprint as being in *black*, and this term is repeated in the Executive approval of 17th April, 1882, hereinafter referred to.

The 1d., 4d., and 6d. values, overprinted in October, 1879, undoubtedly bore the "O.S." in *black*; but the 3d. and 1s. as undoubtedly bore it in *red*. In the case of the latter value the reason for this colour being adopted is abundantly apparent, the stamp itself being printed in black; but with regard to the 3d. the reason is not so clear, as black would show more distinctly against the light green of the stamp than red. Some copies of the 2d. appear to have been first issued with "O.S." in red; but at an early stage of the proceedings this colour was evidently abandoned in favour of the black.

Taking into consideration the distinct wording of the approval, it appears strange that even the 1s. stamp was permitted to bear the overprint in red, without some reference to the change in colour; but the fact that it passed without comment will also account for the absence of any special notice in the case of the other values.

(To be continued.)

